

THE ROLE OF PUEBLO SOCIAL ORGANIZATION IN THE DISSEMINATION OF CATHOLICISM

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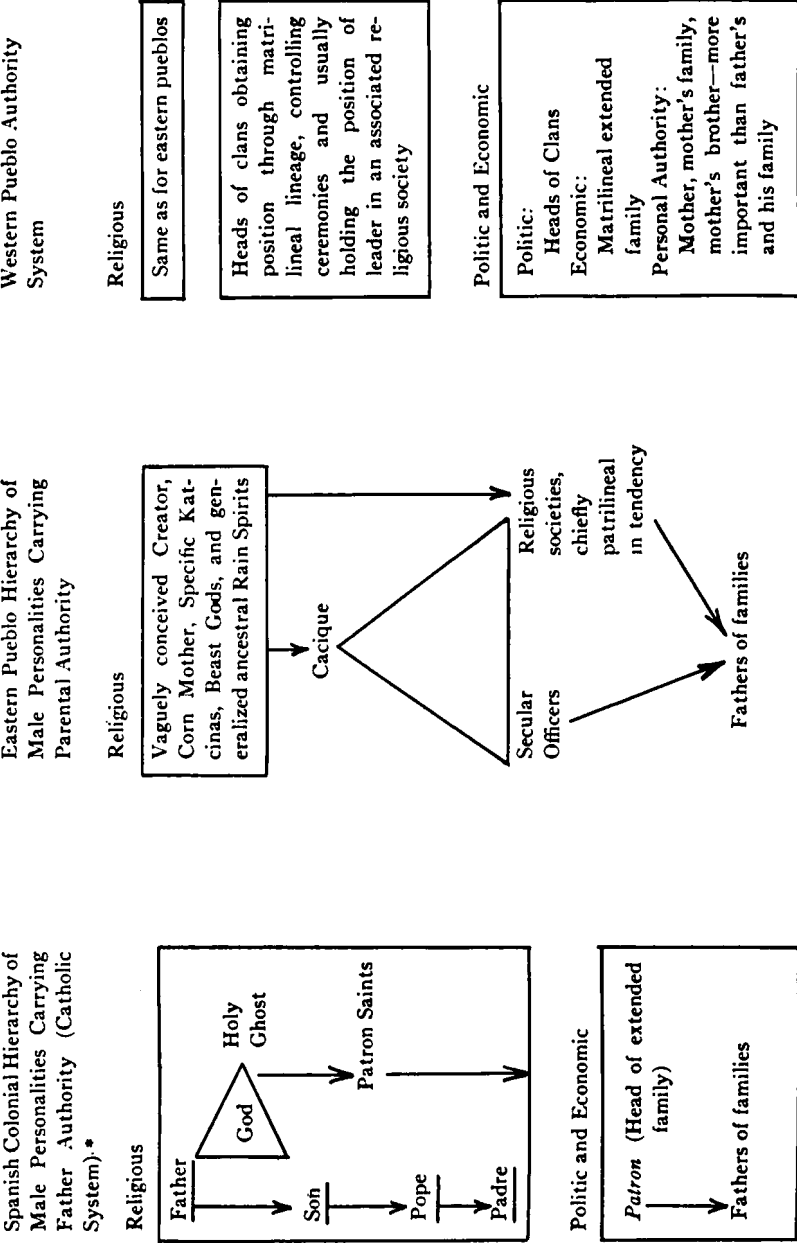
EXCEPT for offering the proselytizing Spanish padres a line of posthumous congratulations for their cleverness in making use of scattered parallels between Catholic and Pueblo ritual, anthropologists have neglected the problem of nominal acceptance of Catholicism by the eastern pueblos. The problem, although largely a matter of theoretical consideration of a past event, becomes the more interesting when we realize that the western pueblos, after a brief taste of Catholicism, rejected it forcefully, killed the priests, burned the missions, and even annihilated the village of Awatobi when its inhabitants showed a tendency to accept the acculturation so ardently proffered. The historical explanation of close association between Pueblos and Spaniards in the Rio Grande area unquestionably would have been an important aid in dissemination of the new faith, but unless some part of that religion actually was acceptable to the proselytes they would not have retained it after the outside compulsion was removed. Today these people continue their native religious practices but likewise remain loyal Catholics (by their own word) and see no real differences between their re-tailored interpretation of the Church and that of Anglo- and Spanish-American Catholics. Today some pueblos are openly and scornfully resentful of any Protestant missionaries attempting native conversions. Why did the eastern pueblo people take into their culture enough of the religion of their conquerors so that they were called—and called themselves—Catholic, at the same time that the western pueblos completely rejected the Padres? A brief comparison of the basic pattern of social organization of the isolated and strongly Catholic Spanish American villages in New Mexico (close cultural descendants of the Spanish Colonials), of the Rio Grande pueblos, and of the Hopis, the westernmost of all the pueblo groups, suggests more than the coincidence of spatial distribution and degree of contact as explanation.

Malinowski has pointed out that Christianity, based on the Father-concept, "the dogma of God the Father and God the Son, the sacrifice of the only Son, the filial love of man to his maker"¹ presumes a patrilineally based society for its followers. "The whole Christian morality, however, is strongly associated with the institution of a patrilineal and patriarchal family, with the father as progenitor and master of the household."² This is especially true of Catholicism and the cultures which grew up around the concepts and customs of the Church during the Middle Ages. The culture of the Spaniards who came first to conquer and later to settle the Southwest was strongly Catholic in

¹ Malinowski, 1927, p. 56.

² *Ibid.*, p. 57.

Figure 1



* Senter, *op. cit.*

belief and customs; even today the Spanish Americans of the anachronistic mountain villages of New Mexico orient their annual community calendar as well as their personal crisis rites around the Church. The Spanish culture was, and that of their Spanish American descendants remains, strongly patrilineal. Senter³ has diagrammed the direction of flow of power and authority in this system from God the Father to God the Son and to the patron saints, then to the Pope and the Priests, who are symbolically addressed as "Father," and then to the heads of families (Fig. I). The father of the typical family in a Spanish American community controls all the finances of the family (including any money the children may earn), decrees what the various members of the family are to do or to avoid doing, chooses or forbids associates, and carries the burden of perpetuating the official and accepted mores of his culture. Consequently, although the children may be fond of him, they usually remain somewhat in awe of him. In the earthly family, as in the Heavenly Family, the father is the undisputed head. The mother, as in the Heavenly Family, likewise carries power, but it is her special province to know the deviations which arise within certain mores of the local culture at a given time and to judge their relative permissibility. She advises her children on their participation in such deviations and carefully keeps such matters from observation of the father, unless some crisis requiring his action arises.

The smaller Spanish American villages lack formal political organization, but in the past (and to some extent in the present) the people of each deferred to the most powerful of the family heads as the *patron*, a person whose wealth usually carried him into some contact with the outside world and who, consequently, could advise the people on matters even beyond the realms of the village. The people expected his patronage and protection, just as he expected their loyalty and labor. He was as a father to them in function and usually was related to the majority of the people of his village through blood or through the ceremonial relationship of godparenthood. His parallel in the heavenly hierarchy was the patron saint of the villages, whose day became the occasion of the principal village fiesta and whose aid in persuading the deity to grant health, prosperity, and personal favors customarily was sought by the villagers.

The Christian concept of good and evil is largely positivistic, certain acts being delineated as sinful and consequently punishable for Catholics and Protestants alike. But in this Spanish American folk culture, where propinquity and lack of outside interests make the move of anyone the concern of everyone, public opinion functions as a sanction even stronger in everyday life than the approval of the Catholic church. And since the opinion of the villagers concerning one's actions must depend upon their knowledge of those actions, it follows that the positivistic concept of an act being good or bad in

³ Senter, n.d. Also, 1945, pp. 31-47.

itself is considerably modified toward the more relativistic concept of an act being good or bad as it chances to be known and evaluated by the neighbors. Although their opinion is, in the main, based on the Church, in a frontier folk community such opinion is likewise, to a large extent, the result of experiences in expediency and the good of the community as effected by the individual. To most people the pangs of conscience are much less tormenting than the gossip, jibes, and even avoidance of disapproving fellow-villagers. In practice, right and wrong then become more a problem of the group-conscience than of the individual conscience, more a matter of obviously flouting native custom than of flouting Church precepts, although, as previously stated, most of the customs of this culture are heavily permeated with 15th and 16th century Catholicism.

The Spanish Americans do not believe in punishment of small children because they feel that the little ones cannot distinguish between right and wrong. But after an individual has grown to youth, his punishments, although rare, may be almost brutal. Punishments for transgression of cultural mores are meted out by the father just as penance is meted out by the village priest and final judgment is expected from the Heavenly Father for transgression of Church precepts.

To the Spanish American villager, Protestant as well as Catholic, life is based upon a background of Medieval Christianity, in which Holy Water may be used for disinfecting rooms or for a cure in disease and equally for an aid in exorcising the devils who guard buried treasure. Charms, herbs, witches, and prayers all mingle in concepts of health, personal fortune, and good or evil. Such ideas were even more important to the Colonists than to their descendants today.⁴

In the eastern pueblos, those most subject to Catholic proselytism and to Spanish acculturation, the social system varies group by group and even pueblo by pueblo. Nevertheless, certain generalized characteristics can be seen to run throughout the Rio Grande. The father of the family is head of the family. Matrilineal clans, where they exist at all, do not carry major functions. Moieties tend to be endogamous, but a woman from the opposite moiety may join her husband's moiety at marriage. Religious societies are joined upon decision of the individual, although he may be pressed toward that decision by dreams, parents, friends, etc.

Both parents are responsible for training and punishment of a child. The family is expected to deal with wrongs committed by any of its members, young or old, provided that those wrongs do not affect the community. As long as an act is only of personal or of family importance, it is of no special concern to the pueblo. Good, broadly, is that which furthers the group; bad

⁴ Scholes, 1935, pp. 195-242.

is that which injures the group. Further, a person is good who is a hard worker, amiable, generous, and loyal, qualities of value to his family and his pueblo. A person is bad if he is lazy, stingy, or ill-tempered and if he does not cooperate with the group in religious practices designed for its welfare. To preserve group uniformity, as well as to encourage the good qualities and to discourage the bad within individuals, gossip and laughter are forceful sanctions in ever constant usage. If a woman's dress is not cut—to the inch—like those of her neighbors, or if a man is thought to associate too much with the whites, a wave of gossip will move through the extended family and sometimes outside to the other families. But if someone commits a crime which is thought to endanger the pueblo from within or without, it is the governor or the war captains who are expected to punish the culprit by confinement within a circle, beating with a whip, or even "accidental" death while on a hunt.

In the native eastern pueblo system, the religious leader, a chief priest or cacique, holds a position close to dictatorship. It seems probable, from our meager data today, that a war chief formerly carried almost equal power, although his functions were more specialized. The cacique not only arranges dates for religious ceremonies but also the dates for cleaning ditches, for planting, and for the harvest. Among the Keresans he appoints the secular officers although, in certain pueblos, after consultation with the heads of specific religious societies or from the ranks of designated societies, but in either case his dominance of, or at least approval of, such officers is understood.⁵ Thus, in governing the people in such secular projects as those in which outsiders are concerned or in keeping peace and secrecy within the pueblo, the governor is exerting power derived from the cacique who, through tradition, carries the power held by all caciques since the gods taught the priests their secrets in the underworld. The cacique holds his place for life and his position is much like that of the father of a family, although his support of the people is preponderantly spiritual and philosophical rather than material, except where such material matters as farming are dependent upon religion. Ceremonies are carried on chiefly by the male members of the curing societies, which likewise must carry the political duties mentioned above. Except where clanship enters the religious picture (and this is not a strong trait even among the eastern Keresans), patrilineity, as indicated in the diagram (Fig. I) is the major scheme. Among the Tewas this pattern is modified in detail by the increased importance of patrilineal moieties, each of which controls the pueblo in religion and in government for one half of each year. Societies, of less power than among the Keresans, function in weather control as well as in cures and, to some extent, in politics.⁶ With clanship, where existent at all, almost entirely lacking in function, the concept of father-importance is even more developed

⁵ Hawley, 1937, pp. 504–522.

⁶ Parsons, 1929.

than among the Keresans. Except in this, the mores of the two groups are generally similar.

In the eastern pueblos children are whipped by parents and, sometimes, by the governor, who may even come to the schoolhouse, whip of office in hand,⁷ and lecture the children on the precepts which they must follow. These experiences and the old stories of capital punishment (by the native government) of adults who did not follow pueblo rule and custom produce something of personal conscience in an individual. Still, the feeling that conformity to village custom, whether in large matters or small, is the principal criterion of right and wrong can lead only toward a type of group-conscience reinforced by the sanctions of gossip, laughter, and avoidance, as already observed in the Spanish American villages. Eastern pueblo relativism is even more developed than that of the Spanish villages because the influence of the positivistic Catholic church is stronger in the villages than it ever has been in the pueblos. But these pueblo people, accustomed to the generalized supremacy of the father in concepts pertaining to the family, the secular government, the religious societies, and the caciqueship, find it easy enough to picture the visiting priest in the village church as a *padre* (father), who is directed by a vaguely conceived Pope, a higher father, who receives his dictates from God, the highest Father. Christ and the saints usually are put upon a single lower level and sometimes receive prayer-sticks when such sticks are put out for the native kachina-spirits at the time of native village ceremonies. The prayers represented by these prayer-sticks and the laying out of altar paraphernalia, the dances, etc., are not, in distinction from the prayers of most Christians, for personal good. They are for the general welfare of the group in provision of food (gained through animal propagation, rainfall for crops, etc.), health, and fertility. On the other hand, the prayers which the pueblo people hear the priest make in church are likewise generalized for the good of the people. From the history of our own culture we know that the Protestants broke away from the Catholics because they desired more individualism than that customary in the Catholic church; the Catholic system is appreciably closer to the basic system of authority and group welfare behind the religion of the patrilineal pueblos than Protestantism could be or than the proselytizing priests ever could have realized without more knowledge of pueblo religion and organization than was permitted them. Nevertheless, these similarities as well as such similarities in ritual practice as making images of the saints (as of kachinas) and of using an altar and paraphernalia, when carefully pointed out by the priests, made the cult of the invaders seem similar enough to that long

⁷ The governor inherits his whip of office as he does the cane or canes of office. At Zia pueblo he visits the day school twice a year to talk to the children.

carried by the eastern pueblos so that they came to profess Catholicism as a part of their native system even after outside pressure was removed.

In contrast to the systems of organization noted in Rio Grande pueblos, western pueblos have oriented their social organization more on the matrilineal than on the patrilineal basis. The outstanding example of this is the system of the most western pueblos, the Hopis of northern Arizona, where the matrilineal clan and its priestly leader are the basis not only of native religious practices but likewise of governmental control in each village. As Titiev⁸ points out, this governmental system is decentralized. The heads of the various clans make up the directive body, and although the political functions which concern the entire pueblo are in the hands of but two clan heads, the Village Chief and the War Chief, other duties, especially ceremonial, are carried by the other clan leaders. The very decentralization of the government presupposes cooperation of the people for the good of the village unit, an end which is stressed in the childhood training gained from one's own family as well as from the outside village group. Resistance to cooperation, like deviation from the standardized pattern of personal behavior, may or may not be punished by the War Chief but certainly will result in condemnation by the other villagers through speech and through avoidance, either of which produces acute distress among a people isolated and closely integrated. Conscience is based upon knowledge of group reactions and sanctions, first within the extended family of the mother,⁹ then of the father, then of the clan of each, and finally of the village. In a matrilineal system, the mother's brother usually carries some of the duties expected of a father to his child in patrilineal societies, and at Hopi it is the mother's brother rather than the father who is responsible for drastic punishment after some considerable breach of discipline.

A tendency toward separations and remarriages may make changes in the male members of a child's family but he always remains with his mother and her people in the house which she owns and into which her husband moves.¹⁰ A child's sense of stability, therefore, comes principally through the mother and her relatives. Although clan leaders, who conduct the religious and the political affairs of the village, are men, they acquire their position through their maternal lineage. This far-reaching emphasis on matrilineity, combined with the lack of centralization of the governmental system and equal lack of emphasis on the individual as such, would provide a difficult field into which the seeds of Catholicism might be planted. Kardiner¹¹ had pointed out the

⁸ Titiev, 1944.

⁹ Although the individual *belongs* to his maternal family and clan, he is known as a *child* of his father's family and clan. Both relationships entail duties and personal contacts within which approval or disapproval is openly manifest.

¹⁰ Thompson and Joseph, 1944.

¹¹ Kardiner, 1945, p. 111.

fact that the religious system within a culture is a replica of the system of parental authority toward a child in the same culture, and Malinowski¹² has described the difficulties experienced by missionaries attempting to explain patrilineal Christianity to the strongly matrilineal Trobriand Islanders of the South Pacific. Although the Hopi are not quite as strongly biased in their social organization, any attempt at proselytism would have had to meet the double barrier of fear and resentment toward outsiders whose conquest of the Rio Grande was known, plus the lack of sympathy of a matrilineally oriented society toward a concept founded on patrilineity.

The distance between the Hopi villages and the center of Spanish power was a potent factor in these natives being able to resist even lip service to the new religion. But the fact that, since its period of original introduction in the Southwest, Catholicism has been retained by the preponderantly patrilineal Rio Grande villages, but has been rejected consistently by most of the Hopis since Spanish domination ceased to be a problem, strongly suggests that differences in internal pattern of organization of the two groups were basic to their differences in reaction toward Catholicism today. The pattern of thought regarding right and wrong in both eastern and western pueblos predisposed them toward easier acceptance of Catholicism than of Protestantism in type of conscience developed, and Catholic pageantry would appeal to both; but only the eastern pueblo people would feel at home under father-domination. We return again to the anthropological truism that traits, to be borrowed, must fit into the pattern held by the borrowing culture, but that, as White points out in describing the Catholicism of Santa Ana pueblo,¹³ the borrowed trait may be so changed by the borrowers that its original owners find difficulty in recognizing it.

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